

Africa Unit

Building an Electronic Micro Network of Members in the Francophone Regional
Advisory Committee (FRAC)

Family Planning Management Development (FPMD)

Project Number: 936-3055

Agreement Number: CCP-A-00-95-00000-02

Office of Population, USAID

Management Sciences for Health

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September 1997

**BUILDING AN ELECTRONIC MICRO NETWORK OF MEMBERS IN THE FRANCOPHONE
REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FRAC)**

APRIL 1996 - SEPTEMBER 1997

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

BUILDING AN ELECTRONIC MICRO NETWORK OF MEMBERS IN THE FRANCOPHONE REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FRAC)

BACKGROUND

The Francophone Regional Advisory Committee (FRAC) was conceived in 1986 under the USAID-funded Family Planning Management Training (FPMT) project in order to overcome the professional isolation in which most Francophone family planning managers were working and to address senior managers' most urgent needs in family planning program management. The FRAC was designed to break the isolation by providing top-level family planning managers in Francophone countries with the opportunity to network and exchange experiences. A long-term goal was to have FRAC members exchange experiences and ideas outside of the annual meeting format and to have the FRAC recognized as a resource for family planning management issues.

Since the first meeting was held in Boston in 1987, the FRAC has convened seven more times, all but the FRAC VIII were fully funded by the FPMD project. The end of FPMD I project, marked the end of guaranteed funding for the FRAC, and another long term goal of the FRAC became the development of the FRAC as a sustainable network which would continue to meet and exchange experience even when their isn't one clear funding source to support annual meetings. The FRAC VII held in Guinea, Conakry was the last FRAC to take place with the full funding of FPMD. The topic of the FRAC VII was sustainability and it was addressed both in terms of family planning programs and in terms of sustainability of the FRAC network itself. The FRAC VIII in Benin was the first meeting which was organized with only partial support of the Family Planning Management Development (FPMD) project. Organizing the FRAC meeting became the responsibility of *l'Association Béninoise pour le Bien-etre Familial* and the Centre for African Family Studies (CAFS). Participants were responsible for finding funding to cover travel, lodging, and meals, as well as paying a participant fee to cover some of the local expenses in support of the sustainability efforts. The Association Beninoise pour le Bien-etre Familial approached donors to cover other local costs. With the success of the FRAC VIII in Benin, the FRAC was well on its way to becoming a self-sustaining network

The collaboration of the FPMD II project with SatelLife, a not-for-profit organization which has developed the HealthNet network, provides an excellent opportunity to move forward with the goal of making the FRAC sustainable network, both programatically and financially. By introducing the FRAC members to HealthNet technology it will be possible to create an electronic micro network of FRAC members who can use the technology to further their dialogue between annual FRAC meetings, to access resources and materials about family planning program management, and to organize their annual meetings. The relatively low-cost of the HealthNet technology and the autonomy of the electronic micro network will also contribute to financial sustainability of the FRAC.

Pursuing the development of a FRAC micro network is an important and relevant initiative for several reasons:

1. *It contributes to FPMD and USAID goals.* The development of a FRAC micro network contributes to both the programmatic and financial sustainability of the FRAC network. Programmatically it enables FRAC members to communicate, exchange information, and organize themselves without constantly relying on the intervention and funding of outside development. Financially the HealthNet technology provides an inexpensive way for Francophone family planning managers to communicate with one another and to access a range of resource materials from organizations and databases world-wide. The FRAC micro network also demonstrates a concrete application of cutting-edge technology and allows us to explore the possibilities for communicating and sharing information over such a network. The micro network is a tool to facilitate and encourage further South-to-South collaboration.
2. *It responds to clients' needs:* In the case of the FRAC, the members of this network are our clients. For the past 8 years the FRAC has addressed the needs of Francophone family planning managers by providing them with support that has been crucial to their work in family planning in their countries; by providing them with a forum and a framework to exchange their experiences and lessons learned; and by serving as a mechanism for transfer of knowledge and exposure to modern management thinking as related to family planning programs and related health services.¹ The FRAC members have expressed a strong interest in having the FRAC continue, but they have also made recommendations for changes to the FRAC which include greater participation of all FRAC members in the preparation of annual meetings; more follow-up and communication between meetings; and less dependence on traditional donors. The development of FRAC micro network contributes to reaching all of these goals by providing an easy means of communication by which FRAC members could interact between meetings and work together to plan future meetings.
3. *It dovetails with FPMD initiatives in other areas:* FPMD Publications Unit is working on the development of electronically published materials. The FRAC micro network provides an excellent forum in which these materials can be posted and pilot-tested.*

*** Discuss further with FPMD Publications Unit and FPMD Technical Unit**

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

An active and functional micro network of FRAC members that interacts through affordable electronic networking and conferencing technology to address family planning and reproductive health program issues between FRAC meetings.

Mertens, Walter. *The Evaluation Report: Francophone Regional Advisory Committee (FRAC)*, April 1995, p.1.

Objectives/Outputs

1. Members of the FRAC are regularly using the micro network to share information and communicate experiences in the management and implementation of family planning programs.
2. Members of the FRAC are holding bi-monthly moderated electronic conferences around pertinent topics of family planning management.
3. Members of the FRAC are using the electronic network to plan, organize, and disseminate materials for upcoming FRAC meetings.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. FRAC members will use the electronic micro network to communicate, once they have received training and understand the value and type of information that can be retrieved through the micro network.
2. Communication will enable FRAC members to organize themselves and plan future meetings without completely relying on a central secretariat, thus creating a sustainable network.
3. Communication and conferencing will benefit the FRAC members by enabling them to exchange experiences and information between FRAC meetings.
4. Moderated electronic conferences will provide a forum for the in-depth exploration of FP/RH management topics.
5. Useful family planning management publications will be available “on-line”
6. Communicating effectively through an electronic network is not an intuitive skill, but can be acquired with training and skill-transfer both technologically and programmatically.
7. HealthNet technology will provide the FRAC members with an easily accessible, affordable, low cost means of communicating with one another.

FPMD/SATELLIFE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Inputs

1. Members of the FRAC are connected to an electronic micro network through HealthNet nodes
2. FPMD/Satellife will provide member of the FRAC with training so that they have the

skills and understanding to use the electronic micro network

3. In conjunction with the FPMD Publications Unit, the FPMD Africa Unit is regularly posting family planning management publications to the FRAC micro network

EVALUATION INDICATORS

Activities

Phase I - April 1996 - November 1996

1. Introduce the concept of an electronic micro network to FRAC participants through phone calls and FRAC update letters
2. Develop selection criteria to determine which organizations and departments should be connected to the FRAC micro network
3. Connect FRAC organizing committee in Mali to the HealthNet/FRAC micro network to facilitate planning of FRAC IX. Organizations to be connected include:
 - DSF-C
 - AMPPF
 - Groupe Pivot
 - CERPOD
4. Train Malian FRAC organizing committee in the use of HealthNet/FRAC micro network so that it can become a useful communication and research tool in preparing the FRAC IX meeting
5. Work with the Malian FRAC organizing committee to develop the FRAC IX program, including the incorporation of SatelLife and the FRAC micro network into the meeting
6. Meet with FRAC members in Burkina Faso and Senegal to introduce them to the regional SatelLife systems operator, Moussa Fall, and to establish a timeframe for connecting to HealthNet/FRAC micro network
7. SatelLife to connect FRAC members in select FRAC countries to pilot test communication, conferencing, and publications dissemination prior to FRAC IX
 - Madagascar
 - Haiti
 - Senegal
 - Burkina Faso
 - Mali
8. In collaboration with the FPMD Publications prepare documents to be presented electronically on the FRAC micro network
9. Prepare training materials for the FRAC XI meeting which address both the technical and communication aspects of an electronic network
10. Adapt facilitation methodology and tools used during FPMD workshops, so that they can be used in the facilitation and moderation of electronic conferencing

Phase II - November 1996 -

1. Connect FRAC members in Cameroon
2. Establish HealthNet nodes in Togo, Benin, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Tunisia, and Morocco**
3. Evaluation of micro network at FRAC 1997 meeting

Establishment of HealthNet nodes in Tunisia and Morocco will be done in conjunction with the FPMD Asia/Near East Unit